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ABSTRACT

In 1990, Moraine Valley Community College conducted a study of writing centers at community colleges belonging to the League for Innovation in the Community College. The survey was designed to gather information on the staffing, facilities, services, operations, budget, and evaluation of writing centers. Questionnaires were sent to and returned by 15 colleges, with 2 college districts returning more than one survey. Major findings of the survey were as follows: (1) 13 colleges reported that their campus had a writing center; (2) directors of writing centers were faculty members at six and administrators at two institutions; (3) more than half of the writing centers employed full-time faculty (69%) and student tutors (62%), while less than half were staffed by part-time faculty (46%) and para-professional tutors (39%); (4) all writing centers offered assistance with writing or revising term papers or research projects, and the majority offered help with word processing (63%) or computer usage (54%); (5) writing centers served an average of 47 students daily; (6) the average salary for a writing center director was $25,823 a year, while para-professional staff earned an average of $8.26 per hour and tutors earned an average of $4.73 per hour; (7) all writing centers notified instructors if a student used a writing center to complete a writing assignment; (8) respondents reported that the availability of a writing center did improve the quality of student writing; and (9) plans to improve writing centers included moving to a larger or better location; increasing the number of staff, computers, or equipment; and the development of a writing across the curriculum program. A directory of writing centers and the questionnaire are attached. (JMC)

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SURVEY OF

Writing Centers in Community Colleges

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JC 910430

Moraine Valley Community College

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SURVEY OF WRITING CENTERS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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June 1990

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I. Introduction

The decision to create a Writing Center at Moraine Valley Community College is based on significant educational issues. In 1988, the Critical Literacy Committee began as an effort to encourage writing across the curriculum and then broadened to encompass all aspects of critical thinking. Much of the literature on critical thinking skills emphasizes the importance of writing as thinking and writing as learning.

In the October 1989 issue of College Composition and Communications, an article entitled "Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing" includes this statement concerning the effective teaching of writing on the college level:

> The effectiveness of classroom writing instruction is significantly improved by the assistance students receive in writing centers. Centers provide students with individual attention to their writing and often provide faculty and graduate students with opportunities to learn more about effective writing instruction. Because these centers enhance the conditions of teaching and learning, their development and support should be an important departmental and institutional priority.

Since good writing skills are important in achieving college and career success, a writing center can offer students instructional opportunities beyond the composition classes offered in the general education curriculum.

Other factors that support the need for a writing center are the performance of community college students at transfer institutions, the requirement that students pass a written proficiency test for entrance and/or for graduation at many state and private institutions, and the criticism by business and industry that many college graduates are functionally illiterate. An article entitled "The 3R's Go to Work" in the Perspective section of the Chicago Tribune on October 29, 1989, states that "companies find their workers can't cope with the sophisticated technology of the modern workplace.... The phenomenon is not limited to blue-collar industries. Aetna Life and Casualty with headquarters in Hartford, Conn., which employs mostly white-collar workers, created a basic education program after finding it could no longer assume [its employees] could write an intelligible sentence...."

Moraine Valley's decision to create a Writing Center that will give students access to the professional help they need to develop and improve their writing skills has led to this survey of Writing Centers already in operation in community colleges belonging to the League for Innovation.

The Research Office at Moraine Valley Community College conducted a survey of Writing Centers in League for Innovation Colleges. The survey was designed to gather information on the staffing, facilities, services, operations, budget, and evaluation of Writing Centers. The purpose of the survey was to help Moraine Valley and other community colleges develop an effective Writing Center that will be an educational asset for our students and for our institutions.

Questionnaires were sent to 15 League of Innovation Colleges in January, 1990. All League colleges returned a completed survey, and two college districts returned more than one survey. A total of 17 replies were received, with 13 colleges reporting that their campus had a Writing Center.

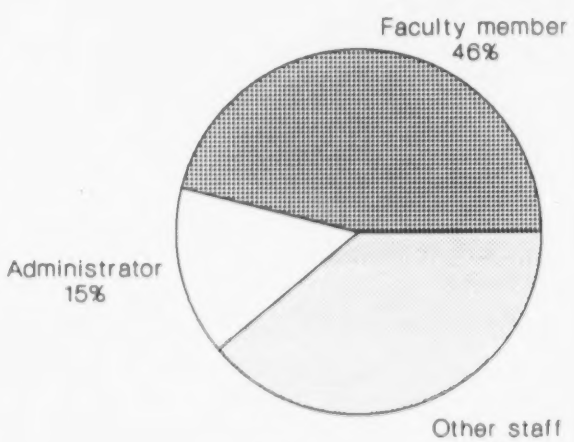
The charts and tables in the following report are based on the thirteen League colleges with Writing Centers in operation. Note that not all respondents answered all questions. Unless otherwise indicated, the percentages in the following charts and tables are based on the number responding to the question. All percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number percent; therefore, some percentages will not add up to 100 percent.

II. Writing Center Staff

Director

Figure 1 shows the percentage of Writing Center directors who are administrators or faculty members. The director of the Writing Center is a faculty member at 6 institutions (46 percent); and an administrator at two institutions (15 percent). Other directors' positions (39 percent) were para-professional staff (N=2), staff (N=1), instructional associate (N=1), and support staff (N=1).

Figure 1
Director of the Writing Center

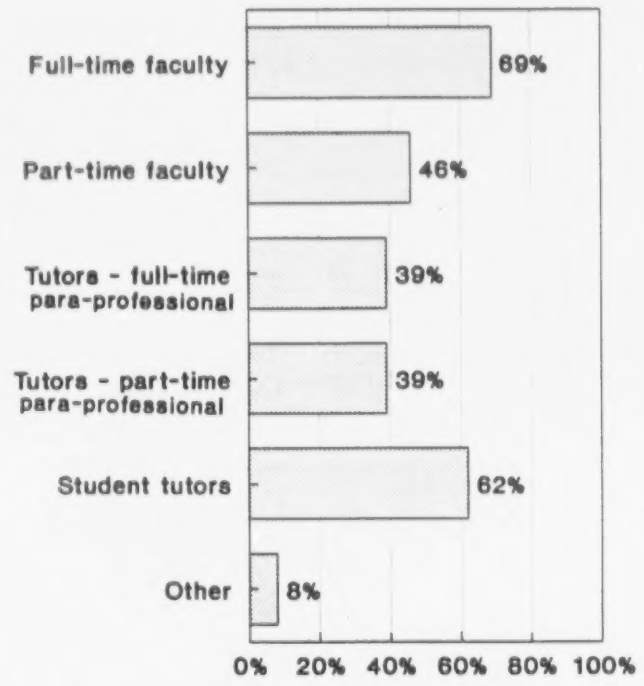


N = 13

Writing Center Employees

The percentage of Writing Centers that are staffed by full- and part-time faculty members, para-professionals, and student tutors is shown in Figure 2. Nine out of 13 respondents (69 percent) indicated that full-time faculty members work in the Writing Center. Almost half of the Writing Centers are staffed by part-time faculty (N=6, or 46 percent). Five Writing Centers (39 percent) employ full-time para-professional tutors; the same number employ part-time para-professional tutors. And 8 Writing Centers (62 percent) employ student tutors.

Figure 2
Writing Center Staff



Nine respondents gave the number of full-time faculty employed in the Writing Center. The number of full-time faculty reported varied between 1 and 10: 6 Writing Centers employ one full-time faculty member; one Writing Center employs two full-time faculty members; one Writing Center employs 5 full-time faculty members, and one Writing Center employs 10 full-time faculty members.

In addition, one respondent reported that all full-time faculty members assist in the Writing Center for one hour per week. And one college reported that part-time teaching assistants (bachelor's degree level) are employed by the Writing Center.

Six respondents reported the number of part-time faculty working in the Writing Center. The range reported was .75 to 8; the

average was 3.8.

Five respondents gave the number of full-time para-professional tutors (range 1 to 4); the same number gave the number of part-time para-professional tutors (range 1 to 5).

Eight Writing Centers (62 percent) employ student tutors; the range reported was 1 to 12. The average number of student tutors employed was 5.5.

III. Facilities and Services

Writing Center Facilities

Figure 3 shows the facilities available in Writing Centers. All respondents report that their Writing Centers have tables and chairs. Nine of 13 Writing Centers (69 percent) have individual desks. Ten Writing Centers (77 percent) have computers; nine (69 percent) have printers. Other Writing Center facilities listed were MAC'S; carrels for tutoring; computers for skill tutorials; projectors for computers; sound/slide projectors; cassette players; PLATO; skills development texts and handouts; and

Figure 3
Writing Center Facilities

Facility	Percent
Tables & chairs	100%
Individual desks	69%
Computers (word processors)	77%
Printers	69%
Other:	46%
MAC's	
Tutoring carrels	
Computer - skill tutorials	
Sound/slide projectors	
Cassette players	
PLATO	
Skills development texts	
"Self-help" handouts	

lending library with "self-help" handouts, including grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Writing Center Services

The student services offered to students in Writing Centers are shown in Figure 4. All respondents (N=13) offer assistance with writing essays or term papers, revising essays or term papers, and research projects. Eleven Writing Centers (85 percent) offer help with proofreading or editing essays or term papers; 8 Writing Centers (62 percent) offer word processing help, and 7 (54 percent) offer assistance with using computers.

Figure 4
Writing Center Services

Assistance With:	Percent
Writing essays or term papers	100%
Revising essays or term papers	100%
Proofreading/editing papers	85%
Research projects	100%
Word processing	62%
Using computers	54%
Other:	46%
Grammar hotline	
Independent study - writing	
Independent study - grammar	
Independent study - ESL	
Independent study - spelling	
Independent study - vocab.	
Independent study - mechanics	
Grammar tutorials	
Computerized spelling program	
Learn. disability consultant	
ESL specialist	
ESL materials & tapes	
Writing & Research workshops	

Other Writing Center services listed by respondents include grammar hot-line; credit courses; independent study courses in English as a second language, grammar, expository writing, spelling, vocabulary improvement, and mechanics; tutorials in specific grammar problems and computerized spelling programs; learning disabilities consultant; ESL specialists; ESL materials and tapes; and workshops on how to do research, write resumes, writing across the curriculum, and other writing issues.

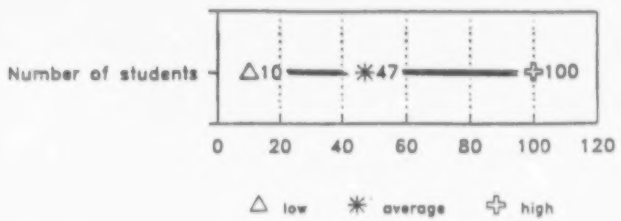
IV. Operations

Number of Students Served

Eleven respondents estimated the average number of students served daily in the Writing Center (See Figure 5). The smallest

estimate of the number of students served daily was 10, and the largest estimate was 100 students. The average estimated number of students served daily was 47.

Figure 5
Average Number of Students Served Daily



Location of the Writing Center

The locations of Writing Centers are shown in Figure 6. Two respondents listed a tutoring center (study skills or academic skills); 2 respondents named the library.

Other Writing Center locations mentioned were near the Academic Achievement Center, Math Center, Computer Lab, and Library; a separate laboratory close to AV department; a tutoring center in the library; in the Communications Building/English department, next to the Reading Lab and the student Computer Lab; 2.5 rooms in the English/Philosophy Building, separate from the Learning Center and Tutoring Center; Learning Lab (Academic); English Department Writing Lab; a large classroom area; and in a separate classroom space near the computer lab, a classroom was converted to a Writing Center.

Writing Center Hours

A summary of the Writing Center's daytime, evening, and weekend hours is shown in Table 1. Seven Writing Centers are open between 8 and 9 hours during the day (until 5 p.m.); usually 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Four of the 7 respondents open between 8 and 9 hours daily also reported that they close two or three hours earlier on Friday. Five Writing Centers are open between 6 and 7 hours during the day, Monday through Friday.

Four Writing Centers (33 percent) are open between 2 and 3 hours during the evening, 2 evenings a week; 5 Writing Centers (42 percent) are open between 3 and 4.5 hours an evening, 4 evenings a week; and 3 Writing Centers (25 percent) have no evening hours.

Four Writing Centers (33 percent) are open on Saturday, while 8 Writing Centers (67 percent) are not open on the weekend.

Figure 6
Location of Writing Center

Location:	Number:
In a Tutoring Center	2
In the Library	2
Classroom near Computer Lab	1
Near Computer Lab, Math Lab Achievement Center, Library	1
Laboratory close to AV Dept.	1
Tutoring Center in the Library	1
Next to Reading & Computer Lab	1
2 1/2 classrooms - English Bldg	1
Learning Lab	1
English Dept. Writing Lab	1
Large classroom area	1

N = 13

Table 1

Summary of Writing Center Hours

Time of Day	Number of Hours Per Day/Evening	Number Responding N = 12
Daytime	8 to 9 hours - 5 days	7
	6 to 7 hours - 5 days	5
Evening	2 to 3 hours - 2 evenings	4
	3 to 4.5 hours - 4 evenings	5
	No evening hours	3

Table 1
(Continued)

Time of Day	Number of Hours Per Day/Evening	Number Responding N = 12
Weekend	2-4 hours Saturday	4
	No weekend hours	8

V. Writing Center Budget

Semester Budget

Eight of 13 respondents (62 percent) reported the amount budgeted for the Writing Center each semester. (See Table 2.) The smallest reported amount was $3,300; and the largest was $225,000.

Care should be taken in interpreting the budget figures in Table 2. While respondents were asked to report their semester budget, several reported an annual amount.

Also, it was not always possible to determine if the reported budget amounts are comparable across institutions. Faculty salaries and supplies, for example, are not always separate from the English department budget. Note that the figure of $34,360 includes salaries only, while the following figure ($11,000-$13,000) does not include the coordinator's salary.

Release Time

Respondents were asked to indicate either the salary or the release time per semester for the director of the Writing Center, full-time faculty, and part-time faculty. Four respondents reported release time for the director of the Writing Center. The number of release time credit hours reported was 3 hours (N=2), 9 hours, and 12 hours a semester.

Release time reported for full-time faculty (N=4) was 1-2 credit hours, 3 hours, release from committee, and 6 hours in Writing Center equivalent to a 4 hour course. Release time reported for part-time faculty (N=3) was 3 credit hours, 3-6 credit hours, and 8 hours.

Table 2

Semester Budget for the Writing Center

$225,000
$67,000 - $68,000 yearly
$59,460
$15,280 per quarter ($45,840 per year)
$34,360 annually for part-time personnel
$11,000-$13,000 not including coordinator's salary
$4,500
$3,300

Staff Salaries

Staff member salaries are reported in Table 3. Four respondents reported the director's salary. The range was $22,690 to $27,600 per year; the average was $25,823. No respondents reported full-time faculty salaries. Three respondents reported part-time faculty salaries ($400 to $518 per credit hour, $10.91 per hour).

The salary range for para-professional staff (N=7) was $5.20 to $11.50 per hour, with an average of $8.26. The salary range for student tutors (N=8) was $3.35 to $6.00 per hour, and the average was $4.73 per hour.

Table 3
Staff Salaries

Staff	Salary	Number
Director	low: $22,690 per year average: $25,823 per year high: $27,600 per year	4
Full-time faculty	-	0

Table 3
(Continued)

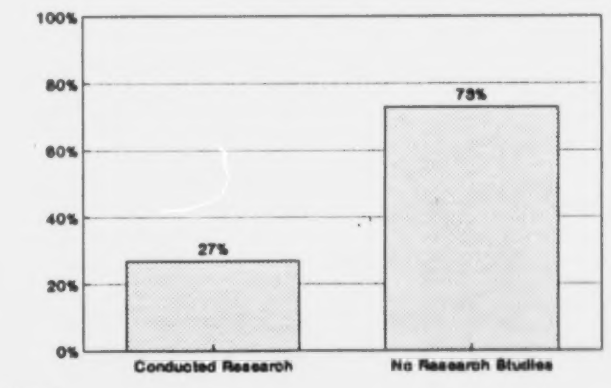
Staff	Salary	Number
Part-time faculty		3
	$400 per credit hour	
	$429-$518 per credit hour	
	$10.91 per hour	
Para-professional staff		7
	low: $5.20 per hour	
	average: $8.26 per hour	
	high: $11.50 per hour	
Student tutors		8
	low: $3.35 per hour	
	average: $4.73 per hour	
	high: $6.00 per hour	

VI. Evaluation of Writing Center

Research

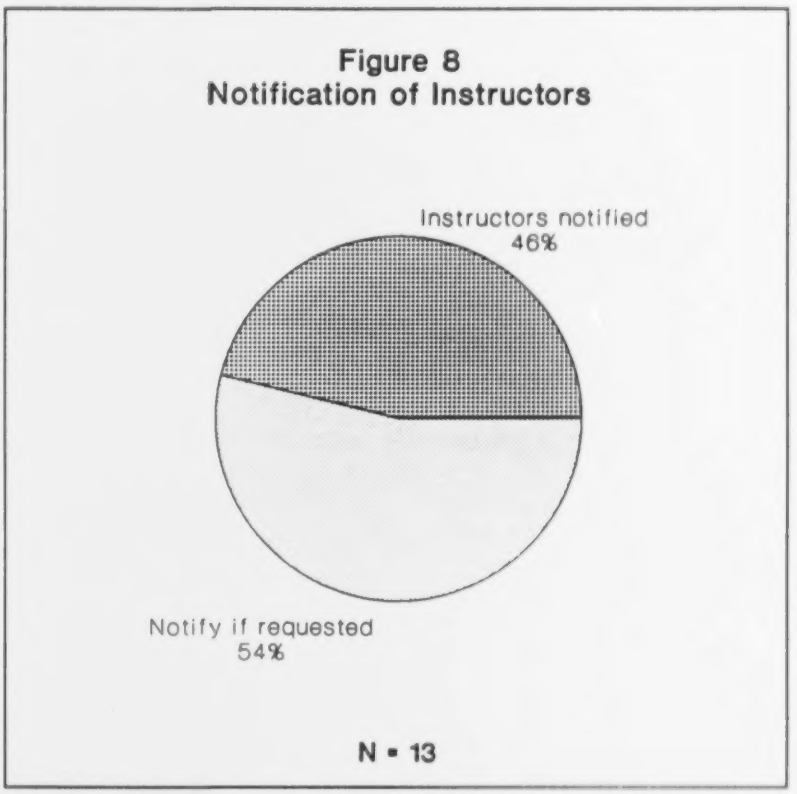
The majority of respondents have not conducted research studies of students who have used the Writing Center. (See Figure 7.) Three respondents (27 percent) have conducted or are in the process of conducting studies, while 8 respondents (73 percent) have not.

Figure 7
Percent Conducting Research Studies



Notification of Instructors

All respondents reported that instructors are notified if a student uses the Writing Center. (See Figure 8.) Six respondents said that instructors are notified when students use the Writing Center to complete a writing assignment; and 7 respondents indicated that instructors are notified if requested.



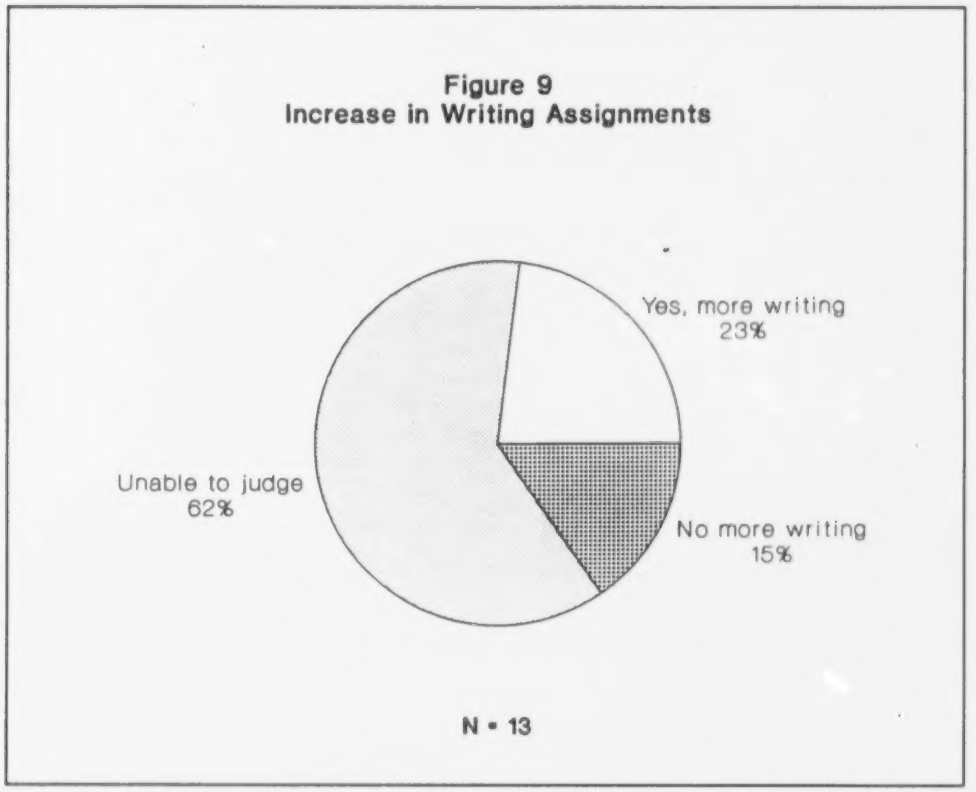
Quantity and Quality of Student Writing

More than half of respondents (N=8, or 62 percent) were unable to judge whether the availability of the Writing Center caused instructors to assign more writing. (See Figure 9.) Three respondents (23 percent) said that instructors gave more writing assignments because a Writing Center was available; and two respondents indicated that instructors did <u>not</u> give more writing assignments.

Respondents did report, however, that the majority of instructors think the Writing Center's availability has improved the quality of student writing. (See Figure 10.) Six respondents (46 percent) indicated that most instructors think that the Writing Center's availability has improved students' writing, and 4 respondents (31 percent) said that some instructors see improvement. Three respondents (23 percent) were unable to judge instructors' opinions of students' writing. No respondent said that the Writing Center did <u>not</u> improve the quality of student writing.

VII. Plans to Improve the Writing Center

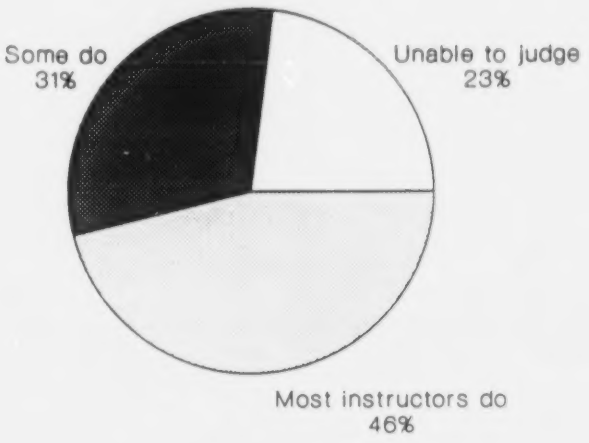
Eight respondents gave a short summary of their plans to develop or improve their Writing Center. Four respondents plan to upgrade or improve facilities by moving to a newer, larger, or better



location; by purchasing more computer equipment; or by purchasing PLATO. Three respondents plan to develop or expand a writing across the curriculum program. Two respondents plan to increase their staff: one institution hoped to have more full-time faculty working in the Writing Center in lieu of office hours; and one respondent planned to hire a para-professional coordinator.

Other plans to improve the Writing Center listed by respondents were the addition of faculty and student evaluations; the development of a computerized management system to record scores and manage a student's progress through computerized testing programs; continuing development of ESL and computer-assisted instruction programs; and a reorganization and joining of the Reading and Writing Labs.

Figure 10
Percent Who Think Quality Has Improved



N = 13

VIII. Summary

- The director of the Writing Center is most likely to be a faculty member (46 percent) or a staff member (39 percent); 15 percent are administrators.
- More than half of Writing Centers employ full-time faculty (69 percent) and student tutors (62 percent). Less than half of the Writing Centers are staffed by part-time faculty (46 percent) and para-professional tutors (39 percent).
- Writing Center facilities usually include tables and chairs, desks, computers and printers. Some Writing Centers also have computer tutorials, skills development texts and handouts, cassette players and projectors.
- All Writing Centers offer assistance with writing or revising term papers or research projects. The majority offer help with word processing (62 percent) or using computers (54 percent).
- Writing Centers serve an average of 47 students daily.

- Writing Centers are located in several areas of the college, including libraries, tutoring centers, computer laboratories, and classrooms.
- More than half of Writing Centers are open at least 8 hours during the day; the rest are open at least 6 hours daily.
- One third of Writing Centers are open 2 evenings a week, 42 percent are open 4 evenings a week, and 25 percent are not open in the evening.
- Two thirds of Writing Centers are not open on the weekend.
- The largest Writing Center semester budget reported was $225,000, and the smallest was $3,300.
- The average salary for the director of the Writing Center was $25,823 a year. Para-professional staff earn an average of $8.26 an hour, and tutors earn an average of $4.73 per hour.
- Most respondents have not conducted research studies of students who have used the Writing Center.
- All Writing Centers notify instructors if a student uses the Writing Center to complete a writing assignment.
- Respondents could not judge whether the availability of the Writing Center caused instructors to assign students more writing.
- Respondents **did** report that the Writing Center's availability has improved the quality of student writing.
- Future plans to improve the Writing Center include moving to a larger or better location; increasing the number of staff, computers, or equipment; addition of evaluations; computer-assisted programs; a reorganization of the reading lab; and the development of a writing across the curriculum program.

BR

APPENDIX A

Directory of Writing Centers

DIRECTORY OF WRITING CENTERS

Central Piedmont Community College
P.O. Box 35009
Charlotte, NC 28235

Director of Writing Center: Augusta Bell
(704) 342-6474

Cuyahoga Community College
700 Carnegie Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44115

Director of Writing Center: Alberta Buzash
(216) 987-5258

Eastfield College
3737 Motley Drive
Mesquite, TX 75150-2099

Director of Writing Center: Theresa Sternat
(214) 324-7177

Foothill College
12345 El Monte Road
Los Altos Hills, CA 94022-4599

Director of Writing Center: Nancy Gill
(415) 949-7290

Humber College of Applied Arts & Technology
205 Humber College Blvd.
Rexdale, Ontario, CANADA M9W 5L7

Director of Writing Center: Sheila Susini
(416) 675-3111, extension 4495

Johnson County Community College
12345 College at Quivira
Overland Park, Kansas 66210-1299

Director of Writing Center: Ellen Mohr
(913) 469-8500, extension 3497

Kirkwood Community College
P.O. Box 2068 (6301 Kirkwood Blvd., S.W.)
Cedar Rapids, IA 52406

Director of Writing Center: Sue Green
(319) 398-4964

Lane Community College
4000 East 30th Avenue
Eugene, OR 97405

Director of Writing Center: Sharon Thomas
(503) 747-4501, extension 2419

Maricopa County Community College District
Glendale Community College
6000 West Olive Avenue
Glendale, AZ 85302

Director of Writing Center: Barbara Hackett
(602) 435-53608

Mesa Community College
1833 West Southern Avenue
Mesa, AZ 85202

Director of Writing Center: Joan Thomas
(602) 461-7515

Miami-Dade Community College
300 N.E. 2nd Avenue
Miami, FL 33132

Director of Writing Center: (South Campus)
Cary Ser
(305) 347-2254

(Wolfson Campus)
Joyce Crawford
(305) 347-3111

Santa Fe Community College
3000 N.W. 83rd Street
Gainesville, FL 32608

Director of Writing Center: Pat Smittle (Learning Lab)
(904) 395-5384

Julie Robitaille (Writing Lab)
(904) 395-5384

St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley
3400 Pershall Road
St. Louis, MO 63135

Director of Writing Center: Susan Lagunoff
(314) 595-4431

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

MORAINE VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Survey of Writing Centers in Community Colleges

Institution _____

Your name and title _____

1. Does your campus have a Writing Center?

   _____Yes _____ No **(Skip to question 17)**

2. What is the name and phone number of the current director of the Writing Center?

   _____ Phone number _____

3. The director of the Writing Center is:

   _____ A faculty member

   _____ An administrator

   _____ Other (please specify) _____

4. How many employees staff the Writing Center?

	Number
Full-time faculty members	_____
Part-time faculty members	_____
Full-time para-professional tutors	_____
Part-time para-professional tutors	_____
Student tutors	_____
Other (please specify) _____	
_____	_____

5. What facilities are available in the Writing Center? (Indicate all that apply.)

   _____ Tables and chairs

   _____ Individual desks

   _____ Computers with word processing capabilities

   _____ Printers

   _____ Other (please specify) _____

6. What services are offered to students in the Writing Center? (Indicate all that apply.)

_____ Assistance with writing essays or term papers
_____ Assistance with revising essays or term papers
_____ Assistance with proofreading/editing essays or term papers
_____ Assistance with research projects
_____ Assistance with word processing
_____ Assistance with using computers
_____ Other services: (please specify) _____

_____

7. Estimate the average number of students served daily in the Writing Center.

_____

8. Where is the Writing Center located?

_____ In the library
_____ In a tutoring center (study skills or academic skills)
_____ Other (please specify) _____

9. What hours is the Writing Center open during the week?

_____

10. What hours is the Writing Center open on weekends?

_____

11. What amount is budgeted for the Writing Center each semester?

_____

12. What compensation do staff members receive?

	Stipend		Release Time Per Semester
Director	$ _____ per _____	or	_____ hours
Full-time faculty	$ _____ per _____	or	_____ hours
Part-time faculty	$ _____ per _____	or	_____ hours
Para-professional staff	$ _____ per _____		
Student tutors	$ _____ per _____		
Other (specify) _____	$ _____ per _____	or	_____ hours

13. Have you conducted or are you in the process of conducting research studies of students who have used the Writing Center?

_____ Yes Please return a copy of your report(s) with this questionnaire.

_____ No

14. Are instructors notified if a student uses the Writing Center to complete a writing assignment?

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ If requested by the instructor

15. Has the Writing Center's availability caused instructors to assign more writing?

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Unable to judge

16. Do instructors think that the Writing Center's availability has improved the quality of student writing?

_____ Most do

_____ Some do

_____ Most do not

_____ Unable to judge

17. Please include any future plans your institution has for developing or improving a Writing Center.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION. PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED SURVEY IN THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE BY FEBRUARY 15, 1990.

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